



**U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Texas**

Johnny Sutton, U.S. Attorney

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July 18, 2005

**FORMER DIRECTOR OF KICKAPOO COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES
SENTENCED TO FEDERAL PRISON**

United States Attorney Johnny Sutton, Harlan Carter, Special Agent in Charge, IRS Criminal Investigation, Jerry Robinette, Acting Special Agent in Charge, United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Gary M. Mitchell, Special Agent in Charge, United States Department of the Interior - Office of Inspector General, and Patrick A. Patterson, Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation together announced that Maricela Mendoza, former director of the Kickapoo Community Health Services in Eagle Pass, Texas, was sentenced this afternoon to 15 years in federal prison and ordered to pay \$103,939.98 restitution.

On October 27, 2004, a jury convicted Mendoza of one count of theft from a health care benefit program and two counts of money laundering. From September 8, 2000, through October 2002, Mendoza stole funds from the Kickapoo Community Health Services, a program established by the Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas and federally funded by the United States Indian Health Service. The money was to be used to pay healthcare providers for medical treatment and medications for Kickapoo tribal members.

"Ms. Mendoza betrayed the tribe by stealing their healthcare benefits. The Kickapoos trusted her and she ripped them off. Today's sentence is justice for her crime," stated United States Attorney Johnny Sutton.

"IRS-CI together with the law enforcement community are united in our resolve to financially disrupt criminal organizations that commit crimes against our society," stated Harlan J. Carter, Special Agent in Charge, IRS-Criminal Investigation.

"Today's sentencing is a prime example of the commitment that ICE and other law enforcement agencies coordinated in championing for the victims in this investigation who were setback by those who have little regard for humanity," said Alonzo Pena, Special Agent in Charge for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. "ICE will continue to use all of its investigative authorities to attack this criminal element and those who engage in this illegal activity."

"The theft and misapplication of federal funds by Maricela Mendoza had severe financial consequences on the health and well-being of the Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas. This federal sentence cannot undo the damage Ms. Mendoza caused the Kickapoo tribal members, however, it does send a strong message to anyone who would embezzle money for their own benefit that they will be held accountable for their criminal activity," stated Gary M. Mitchell, Special Agent in Charge, United States Department of the Interior - Office of Inspector General.

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“Each and every taxpayer supports the lawful medical support of our citizenry. Unfortunately, there are individuals who take advantage of this system and line their own pockets through fraudulent means. This sentence is appropriate for defrauding the hardworking taxpayers of this country,” stated Patrick A. Patterson, Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

This ongoing investigation is being conducted by agents from the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Department of the Interior-Office of Inspector General, Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. This case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys William R. Harris and Joe Sepeda.

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